

Developing a Healthy Life Style

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

by Kathy Burford

The halfway mark of the school year is fast approaching, and now is an opportune time to reflect on the past several months and evaluate how well you think you did in managing your personal and work-related stress. If you were to grade your efforts, would you pass or fail? Would you say you are doing well or are you feeling tired and worn-out with low self-esteem. If the latter is the case, you might use this time to not only recharge and renew your batteries, but also to make new commitments and decisions for the New Year. Now is a good time to start paying attention to your own mental and physical health needs and sense of well-being. It's never too late to make changes and re-adjustments in attitude, negative self-talk, and a lifestyle that might not be healthy or beneficial to yourself.

If you've ever made a New Year's resolution on January 1 and abandoned it on January 2, you understand how reluctant human beings are to change. Our habits are something we can count on and they give us a sense of certainty about life. Attempting to break a bad habit or acquire a new one, even if for the better, can make us feel uncomfortable and lead us back to the familiar. What are some ways we can go about doing things differently and guarantee a successful change?

Be Honest With Yourself

Learn to know your own limits and make an effort to be aware when you are ignoring your physical and emotional needs during a period of constant or severe stress. Denying a problem will not make things better. In fact, our bodies have a way of telling us when we are not paying attention to what we need. Occasionally, our body might be talking to us through a throbbing headache or pain in our muscles, or by not allowing us to sleep or to relax, or becoming sick with various other types of physical symptoms. If you've stopped providing yourself with good self-care which includes eating well-balanced meals, getting regular exercise, rest, and recreation, it might be time to take a good look at your lifestyle and consider what actions you can take to change things for the better.

Changing Habits

Thinking about the work involved in changing a habit can stop us before we start. Instead of picturing the project as overwhelming, remember that change happens with that first small step. It is with the accumulation of all those little steps that you'll reach your goal.

The Key To Change

Habits take some time to acquire and it takes some time to revise, eliminate or add new habits. The key to behaviour change is to define exactly the behaviour you want to change, set realistic goals to change it, take small steps toward those goals and reward yourself for every movement toward positive change.

Be Specific

For example, the statement "I want to get some exercise," is a start toward defining the behaviour change, but doesn't set forth exactly how you are going to accomplish it. On the other hand, "I will set aside 20 minutes on Monday, Wednesday or Friday mornings to take a walk" is a much more specific plan with a realistic goal. Later, if you want to increase the time you spend walking, you will have already taken the first small steps toward your goal by getting in the habit of taking a short walk three times a week. After one week of meeting your commitment, you might want to reward yourself with something you enjoy, such as buying a book or going to a movie.

Record Your Progress

Another way to make habit change fun is to keep a diary and record your accomplishments, or post a chart on a wall where you can see what you've done. That kind of positive feedback does wonders for motivation. Most of all, have enthusiasm for what you are doing and keep a sense of humour. Before you know it, you will have gained a positive habit, and skills to take on new ones.

Finding Balance

Are you a workaholic? Do you have a tendency to ignore traditional boundaries between what is work and what is not? While not all people who work hard are workaholics, if you are finding that your work has become detrimental to meaningful relationships, such as family and close friends, there is a possibility that you may have fallen into this

category. Instead, you need to create more balance in your life by making a shift of your energy from work to also including having fun and enjoying relationships more.

Eat Right And Exercise

Eat sensible amounts of nutritious food. Eating right can help you feel your best and control your weight. Too much of one kind of food or beverage can take your body out of balance. Too much caffeine can make you tense or sleepless. Too much alcohol can cloud your thinking. Participate in some enjoyable physical activity. Although there are different types of exercise to achieve different goals (such as aerobic exercise for heart health), you don't have to take up running or power walking to reap the benefits of some physical activity. A day spent outdoors or an evening with friends can provide other benefits if you find the activities relaxing.

Rest Your Mind And Spirit

Don't forget that your mind and spirit need a balanced diet and exercise as much as your physical body does. If you find yourself constantly worrying about a problem, talk about it with a friend or trusted advisor. Going for a walk, reading a book, or enjoying a hobby can also help you relax mentally.

Get Variety In Life

Variety is essential in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. If you're in a rut, overstressed, not eating well or not getting any exercise, vary your routine. Regularly implement just one small change in your routine and it can make the world of difference.

You may find making positive changes a difficult thing to do, or you may have more serious problems that need attention. If that is the case, you may consider using the help and expertise of a counsellor to help you. The [Employee Assistance Program](#) is there when you need it. Don't hesitate to call your Employee Assistance Program for confidential help. It could be one of the best decisions you ever made.

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